

(b) whether it is a fact that during the last fiscal year the cost of providing postal articles and services continued to rise but even then, Government incurred a deficit of about Rs. 1652 crores;

(c) if so, the reasons therefor;

(d) what steps Government are taking to stimulate cost effective viable operations in the postal sector; and

(e) by when such a postal tariff panel is likely to come into existence?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN): (a) to (e) There is no proposal to set up a separate Postal Tariff Panel in order to phase out subsidies on postal items. The cost of providing postal articles and services continues to rise during the last fiscal year. The deficit for the year 2000-2001 has been to the tune of Rs. 1,550 crores. The high deficit of the Department of Posts is due to continuous increase in the cost of operations and for maintaining a large rural postal network having 1,38,443 post offices. Further, the cost of operations has been increasing due to revision of salaries, wages, dearness allowances and rise in cost of various inputs in operations of the service including cost of transportation etc. The increase in postal tariff has also taken place at small doses and that also not every year. The percentage increase in revenue has always been less than the expenditure in providing postal services.

The Government has taken number of steps for generation of additional income through introduction of premium products services like Speed Post, Business Post, Greeting Post, Media Post *etc.* to cater the needs of business and corporate clients. The Government is also exploring new prospects of business in partnership with other organizations, for example, 'Money Transfer Service' in collaboration with Western Union, 'Electronic Fund Transfer' in partnership with UTI Bank, E-Post Project with Nettilinx, distribution of Mutual Fund Bonds, *etc.* Besides, several cost cutting measures have also been taken with the help of technology to keep down the cost of operation at the barest minimum level.

Issue of Pakistani Visa to Indian Journalists

* 162. SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have approached the Government of Pakistan on the issue of granting visa to the Indian journalists to cover Afghanistan developments;

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(b) if so, the response of Pakistan thereto; and

(c) the number of Indian media persons (both print and electronic) who have been issued visa?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) The question of grant of visa to Indian journalists to cover developments in Afghanistan was taken up with Government of Pakistan at various levels including by our High Commissioner in Islamabad with the Foreign Secretary of Pakistan.

(b) and (c) As per information available with Government, no Indian journalist (holding Indian passport) was issued visa by Government of Pakistan after 11th September, 2001.

Special Social Security Schemes for Retrenched Workers

* 166. SHRI RAMACHANDRA KHUNTIA: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have evolved specially designed scheme for retrenched workers from various sectors till they get alternative employment;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken/proposed to be taken by Government to prepare special social security schemes for such retrenched workers?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI SHARAD YADAV): (a) to (c) Pursuant to the announcement made in the Budget for the financial year 2001 -2002, the four nationalised General Insurance Companies i.e. (i) National Insurance Company Limited (ii) New India Assurance Company Limited (iii) Oriental Insurance Company Limited ; and (iv) United India Insurance Company Limited have finalised the Scheme of "Ashrya Bima Yojna" which has been launched with effect from 10th October, 2001 with a view to extend social security cover to workers adversely affected due to loss of jobs.

From the year 2001-2002 the Department of Public Enterprises have introduced the Scheme for counselling, re-training and re-deployment of rationalised employees of Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSUs) with an objective to reorient these employees through short duration training programmes to encourage them to avail of opportunities of self-employment after their separation from the Public Sector Enterprises due to Voluntary Retirement under (VRS) or retrenchment due to closure of the enterprise.